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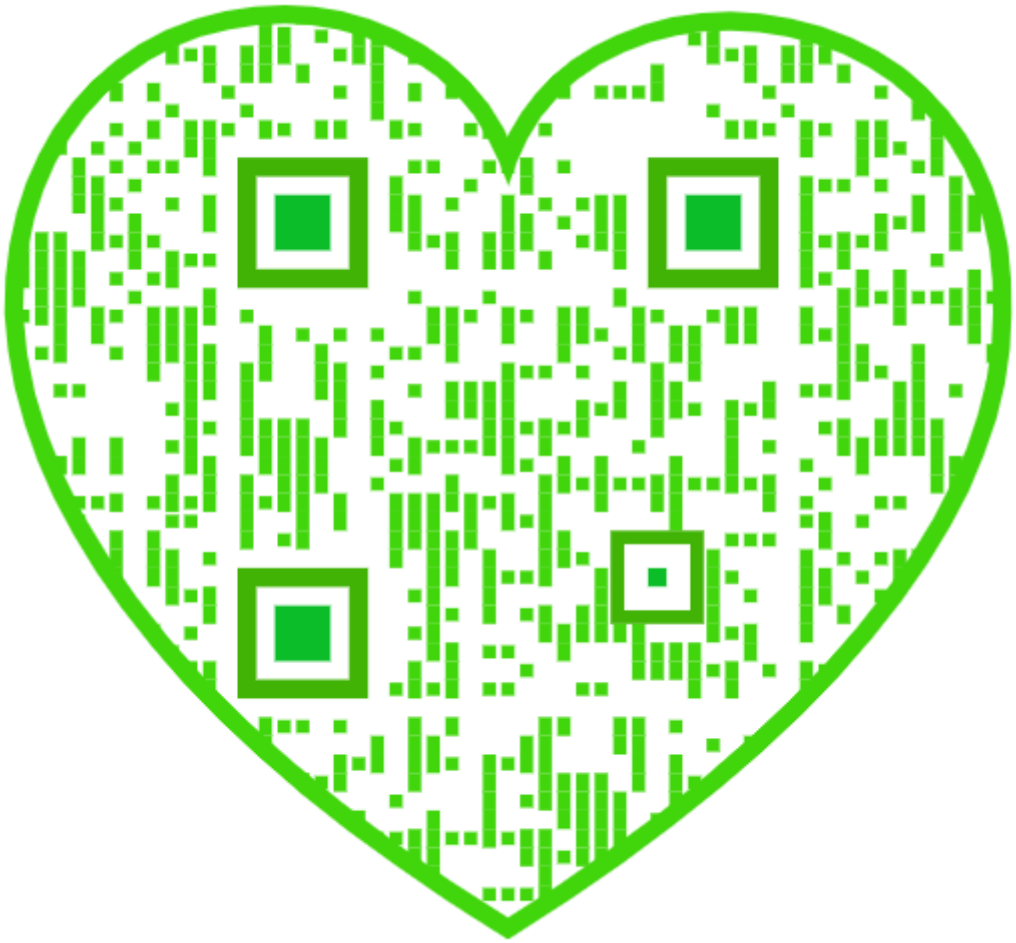

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· WOODCUTS ·

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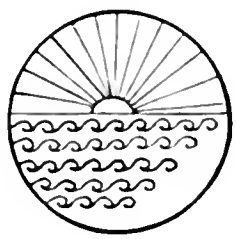
F. SANDYS, 1860-1866



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BY

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TO

HOWARD STEWART, M.D.

The Woodcuts of Frederick Sandys

TO those students and artists of the present day who may not be sufficiently acquainted with the black-and-white illustrations of Frederick Sandys, this short preface may prove acceptable. Many artists are familiar with, and hold in high esteem, his designs, numbered amongst that brilliant band of English illustrators in the sixties. This collection of illustrations reproduced from the original woodcuts will doubtless prove of great value to the earnest student, indeed, their fine qualities are so manifest, their admirable draughtsmanship and high intellectual capacity so noticeable that one cannot praise them too highly. Sandys' drawings at their best, and in their own particular manner, rank with the finest drawings ever executed by a modern artist. He was perhaps the highest endowed of all British line draughtsmen, both technically and in his perfect sense of composition combined with poetic invention and lofty thought.

The twenty-five reproductions here collected, forming the complete work of Sandys in black and white illustration, may help to make more widely known his genius and encourage the student to follow his example by their fine craftsmanship and earnestness of purpose.

I am indebted to Mrs. Sandys for kindly furnishing me with the following notes and particulars concerning her husband's work.

Antony Frederick Augustus Sandys, to give the artist his full name, was born on May 1st, 1832, in the city of Norwich, and died on the 25th of June, 1904, in London, where the greater part of his life was spent. He was the only son of Antony Sandys, a portrait painter of that city, and a descendant of Archbishop Sandys. The father in pursuit of his profession made a close study of the techniques and methods of the early painters, a discovery Frederick Sandys closely applied in the preparation of his canvasses and pigments, but as these remarks deal with his black and white work only, it is unnecessary here to speak of this branch of his art.

The woodcuts which came from his hand were published in the different magazines between the years 1861 and 1866. They are now very scarce, and hard to find, and but few persons are fortunate in possessing a complete set of them.

Sandys' close application and conscientiousness in the perfecting of every detail of his work was extraordinary. He drew everything from life, seldom ever making use of the lay figure for his draperies, and in fact did nothing without a model before him. The power he had over his brush was remarkable, for a great part of his work was done with a sable brush so fine it became sometimes practically one hair, his other instrument was a quill pen cut by himself from the tip of the point upwards. It was his method to prepare most careful studies in pen and ink or pencil, before drawing direct on the wood block. He never used Chinese white to lighten or correct, but worked from a large slab of Indian ink originally belonging to Cotman.

In an interesting article in the "Studio Magazine," October, 1904, Mr. Percy Bate writes "Sandys himself said that Swain's rendering of "his drawing of 'Danae' was perfect, and he was not uncritical . . .

The Woodcuts of Frederick Sandys

"This fact is possibly due to the artist's method of working on the "block, after he had made the pen-drawing on millboard. He told me "that his first boxwood block was a puzzle to him when he received it. ". . . He knew nothing of the correct way of preparing it; it was "impossible to work on its smooth surface with either pencil or pen, "and he finally drew the *Portent* line by line with a brush and Indian "ink and found the process so simple and the result so satisfactory that "he always thereafter employed the same method. In his illustration "George Macdonald's story of *The Portent* the artist's power seem "mature; his touch is unfaltering, his long sweeping lines are full of "strength, and the figure is rendered with a fine feeling for form and "contour, is instinct with a dignity almost sculptural."

Amongst his earliest efforts were drawings made for the Reverend Bulwer to illustrate his "Antiquities of Norfolk," a wonderful manuscript book containing original water-colour drawings by Crome and Cotman, and which was offered, I believe, for ten thousand pounds to the British Museum.

His first commission, an illustration for a woodcut, was from Thackeray, the editor of "Cornhill," for which, in 1860, he made the drawing to illustrate the "Legend of the Portent," receiving for it the sum of forty guineas.

His next essay in illustration was the woodcut appearing on page 350, vol. IV. of "Once a week" to a poem entitled "Yet once more on the organ play"—a translation of a ballad by Ughland, Düreresque in its treatment of the line but with no trace of plagiarism. Also in "Once a week" for 1861 appeared "The Sailor's Bride," vol. IV., page 434. "From my window," vol. V., page 238. The "Three Statues of Aegina," vol. V., page 491, and "Rosamund, Queen of the Lombards," vol. V., page 691. In "Once a week," vol. VI., page 183, appeared a profoundly beautiful illustration to George Meredith's poem "The old Chartist." Vol. VI., page 322, of "Once a week" contains "The King at the Gate" and "Jacques de Caumont" on page 614 of the same volume.

On page 154 of vol. VII. "Once a week" is found "Harold Harfagr" —a woodcut illustrating a poem by George Borrow, with whom Frederick Sandys had become acquainted in early boyhood, under the roof of one of the Miss Gurneys, of Earlham. It was here he heard the MS. of "Lavengro" read by the author, and was powerfully impressed by the personality of Borrow, whose black eyes had a glow of fire in their depths, their effect being enhanced by a tossing mane of prematurely whitened hair. On page 266 of this volume of "Once a week" is "The Death of King Warwulf." "Once a week," 1862, contains the "Boy Martyr."

The "Cornhill" for 1862, vol. VI., contains the woodcut illustrating the tragic German legend "Manoli." To this year also belongs the beautiful and suggestive woodcut to Mrs. Craik's poem "Until her death" which appears in "Good Words," 1862, page 312.

Willmott's "English sacred poems" published in this year, contains

The Woodcuts of Frederick Sandys

two engravings "Life's Journey" and "The little Mourner." In "Good Words" for 1863, page 589, is found the woodcut "Sleep," the view through the window being the river Yare, as it appeared from the painter's own window.

The "Churchman's Magazine" for 1863, contains the woodcut "The waiting time," a powerful figure full of pathos. In the "Shilling Magazine" for 1865 appears the illustration to Miss Christina Rossetti's lovely and soul-moving poem "Amor Mundi" the woodcut which of all others Mr. Sandys himself preferred. The "If" illustrating another of Christina Rossetti's poems appeared in the "Argosy" for 1866. The "Quiver" of 1866 contains the "Advent of Winter" and "Cassandra and Helen" illustrating a poem of A. C. Swinburne's in "Once a week" for this year.

In the "Cornhill" for 1866 is found another illustration to a poem by Swinburne, "Cleopatra."

"Jacob hears the voice of the Lord" an early woodcut which was not published until 1881 in Dalziels' Family Bible.

In the "Century Guild Hobby Horse," vol. III., page 47, 1888 appeared the "Danae in the Brazen Chamber," originally drawn to illustrate a poem by Swinburne in "Once a week" but not published at the time.

Of these woodcuts Mr. Bate says, "Indeed there is nothing like "them in British Art. Each is as much a masterpiece as an etching by "Rembrandt, in almost everyone we find deep poetic feeling, and lofty "emotion allied to a wonderful decorative charm and an unexcelled "mastery of the method. Turn the portfolio; and we pass from gem "to gem. How unaffected they are, and yet how individual! What "style is there, what serene vigour! Here is the grim tragedy of "*Manoli*, here the opulent 'body's beauty' of *Danae*, here the "emotion of *If*, here the statuesque grace of *Amor Mundi*, and surpass-"ing all these in poignant intensity of tragic emotion is the superb "*Rosamund* than which scarcely a finer black-and-white exists in the "art of England. Masterly in the beauty of its design, unexcelled in the "strength and sauvity of its line."

BOROUGH JOHNSON, R.I.

THE PORTENT.

"YET ONCE MORE ON THE ORGAN PLAY"

THE THREE STATUES OF AEGINA.

FROM MY WINDOW.

ROSAMUND, QUEEN OF THE LOMBARDS

THE SAILOR'S BRIDE.

THE KING AT THE GATE.

JACQUES DE CAUMONT.

THE OLD CHARTIST

HAROLD HARFAGR

DEATH OF KING WARWULF

THE BOY MARTYR

MANOLI.

UNTIL HER DEATH.

SLEEP.

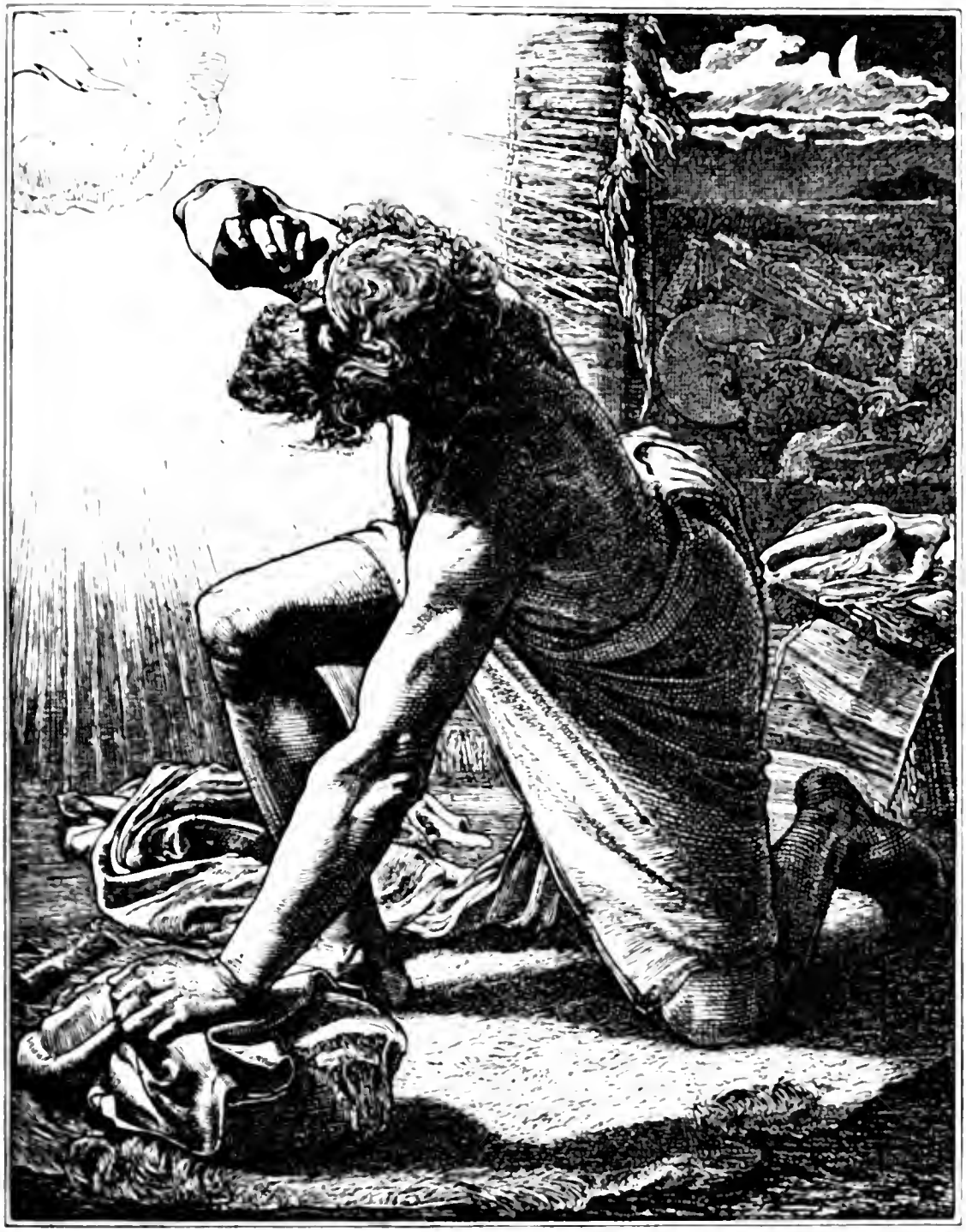
THE WAITING TIME

AMOR MUNDI.

THE ADVENT OF WINTER

CASSANDRA AND HELEN

CLEOPATRA



JACOB HEARS

THE LITTLE MOURNER

LIFE'S JOURNEY

DANAE IN THE BRAZEN CHAMBER

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